

5 Easy Ways Board Members Can Help During This Crisis

By Joan Garry



During a crisis, it's hard to know exactly what to do. I get that. You've learned over time that you provide high-level governance and leave the day-to-day management to the staff. But this crisis is like no other. It requires more.

You probably have a lot on your plate. You likely have a day job, and it's hard to imagine that Covid-19 has not struck close to home. You are, no doubt, also looking at your finances in a radically different way. And the burden of social isolation feels heavier each week.

If you are feeling too overloaded to help, paralyzed by the enormity of the crisis, or guilty for not doing more, I'd like to help. The solution is wildly simple.

Stop what you are doing right now, and send an email to your executive director. You can cut and paste the following:

Dear Executive Director, I'd really like to help. I have some ideas. Let's talk. Warm regards, Your Name.

That's it: Offer to help. I know what you are thinking: What can I do?

Here are five ways to help. They are easy, cost little, and can be accomplished fairly quickly. They'll demonstrate the kind of support any executive director would feel lucky to have.

Send your executive director a small gift. Whatever little thing you send will feel very big. No idea what to send? Contact the leader's spouse, partner, or colleague and ask for suggestions. You may even want to ask fellow board members to send you \$20 via Venmo, so you can send a joint gift of greater value. Think about what the executive director likes to eat or drink: Omaha steaks for the grill? Perhaps they have a favorite summer rosé or young children who would welcome *anything* to keep them occupied. The key? A personal touch. Even something as simple as a handwritten note from the chair would have a big impact.

Ask the CEO for a list of people to call and one good story. In all honesty, nonprofits steward their donors and volunteers very poorly. You can be part of the solution. Offer to call five people in the organization's network to (a) check in on them and (b) let them know that the work continues and the need grows. Ask for a compelling story to share.

Share a post about the nonprofit's results or work on social media. Simply say: "The world feels pretty dark, but my board service at _____ gives me hope and a bit of light. I'm proud to be a part of this work." Include a few pictures.

Request an addition to the next board meeting: a discussion of the organization's strengths during these dark days, basically an overview of its ability to be adapt. During the meeting, after the CEO explains how the organization has pivoted, be sure to say something like this:

"I believe that our ability to get to the other side of this crisis depends on the board's willingness to take chances, try new things. We must avoid being too cautious or risk averse. Our work this year proves that we can do amazing things when we allow ourselves to be creative."

Send each trustee and staff member the book *Great By Choice*. Written by the gifted business author Jim Collins, the book is based on a study of organizations that even in a crisis managed to rise above the competition. Suggest that a subcommittee be formed to assess its lessons and apply them to your organization.

At the risk of sounding self-serving, I ask you to share this article with your fellow board members because I want all trustees to appreciate their nonprofit work, to realize that the little things they can do are actually big, and to see themselves as ambassadors.

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